

AN AMBASSADOR IN BONDS

The Story of
WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON



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AN AMBASSADOR IN BONDS.

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The Story of
WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON, Priest,
Of the
Mission to the Blind of Burma.

By his Sister,
MARY C. PURSER.

With an Introduction by the Right Rev. R. S. FYFFE,
formerly Bishop of Rangoon.

Second Edition.

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PREFACE.

“Whereas it is possible that some people may attribute my early demise to the particular mode of living which I have adopted in my missionary work in Burma, and whereas such an attitude might tend to deter other missionaries from following what I believe to be—for such as are able—the most excellent way of presenting the Incarnation of our Lord, I desire that my executor should consider the advisability of making some definite pronouncement on this point.”

In this extract from his will, Fr. Jackson desired it to be known that his early death was due, not to the ascetic life he lived, but to an internal malady which would have been fatal however luxuriously he might have lived.

The passage is, however, of importance for another reason. It indicates the guiding motive of his life; he was beset by the conviction that he must show forth in his mode of life the spirit of the incarnation. He must *condescend to men of low estate*; in Hoxton, he must live in an empty house which his boys could regard as their own; in Burma, he must adopt the manner of life of his

Burmese sons, wearing their clothes, eating their food with his fingers, going barefoot and bare-headed, and sleeping on the floor.

It is not difficult to imagine that a character such as his vitalised all those who came within its reach ; nor is it unnatural that those who gained vitality and inspiration from him while he was living should desire, as far as it is possible to do so, to help others to have a share in this inspiration by telling the story of his life.

W.C.B.P.

English friends will be disappointed that nothing is included about Fr. Jackson's ministry in the homeland—a romance in itself. Out of a mass of letters and information collected from friends a memoir twice the size of this present little volume was compiled, even then affording only a very slight presentation of Fr. Jackson's life and work. The exigencies of publication, however, made it necessary to reduce the material. This task was carried out by my husband.

M.C.P.

THE VICARAGE,
TEYNHAM.

August, 1932.

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INTRODUCTION BY THE RT. REV. R. S. FYFFE,
formerly Bishop of Rangoon.

I AM honoured to be asked to write a few words of introduction to the memoir of that hero of Burma and the mission field, Fr. Jackson, which is being prepared by his sister, Mrs. William Purser. It is good for us all and good for the work in which we are engaged to dwell even for a few moments on a career so devoted and so fruitful. I have space to record only a few outstanding features of that career which struck me as I looked at him and his work from the position of his bishop.

First there is the over-ruling providence of God in his life and work. He was specially gifted. None could deny that. His career in spite of what we call his infirmity—the degree at Oxford; the invention of a Braille type in the Burmese language so effective that it has been said that, with its help, a blind Burmese child can learn to read more quickly than one with sight; his music; his poetry—these are all evidence of special gifts from God. And we must ascribe to God's guidance that call to the sacred ministry

that was so precious to him ; the call to his great work for Burma in 1917 ; his preservation in the inevitable dangers to his life in a tropical country which he himself so completely ignored. Nay, in his very blindness and even in that fell disease that brought his life to such an early close, we still discern the Divine guidance, for, without the one, his work for Burma could not have been done ; and, without the other, his life of sacrifice would not have been crowned, as it has been, by his death.

But gifts are no use without the will to use them. What a will he had ! He was no secretary of a committee or anything of that kind. He 'saw' his work and how it was to be done. He was ready to accept help, but not to be ruled. He had to be dictator. Well ! dictators are wanted sometimes. It is a dangerous office to claim, and the claim to it is only justified by utter devotion and real success. Both justifications were his. It was that will that brought him to church morning by morning at 6 a.m. when he was supposed to be in England for rest and recovery, and that took him back to be among his blind boys in church in Burma (where I remember finding him), I think, within three weeks of his first operation, and that in a climate in which recovery

is not swift and easy. It was that will that made his work what it was—not a mere showy veneer, but deep and real. He got right down to the Burmese language and to the heart of his boys and girls. He gave Burma a gift for ever. The work he did will stand.

To pity him was to insult him. Both for himself and his pupils he claimed an active and useful place in life. And because he was so uncompromisingly thorough in what he did, he has a rightful place among those who carry from England to Burma and countries like it the great heritage of British character. It was his Majesty the King, I think, who told us that England's best export is English character. That is true as long as those who go out are true to sample. Jackson was.

And Burma has recognized the value of his work. When we decided to invite him to come out we had no funds and we could not ask the S.P.G., which helps Burma so generously, to increase its grant. But we believed that Burma would respond to our appeal for its own blind, backed by such an offer of service as Fr. Jackson's. We were not disappointed. Burmese, Chinese, Indians, government officials, the great British firms in Burma, the government of Burma

itself, all joined to find the money needed for the work in Burma, while English friends found the materials needed from England. The last and most touching appreciation of his work in his lifetime was the conferring upon him of the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal, when Sir Charles Innes, the governor, accompanied by Lady Innes, Mrs. Booth-Gravely and others, stood by the bedside of the dying missionary and gave him this token of the Empire's recognition of his work. He gave his life to Burma, and Burma appreciates the gift.

I should not fulfil the part assigned to me in this memoir if I did not acknowledge what Fr. Jackson and his work owe to the support and sympathy of relations and friends. It takes but little imagination to grasp what it cost his father and the other members of his family to allow and encourage him to go out to Burma, and at last to return there to die. They have shared his sacrifice, and we should not forget it.

Nor should we forget the great comfort and support he received from his sister, Mrs. Purser, while she and her husband remained in Burma. To return to Burma, as Fr. Jackson did, knowing that they were no longer there, adds one more jewel to his crown of sacrifice.

Other names that must be associated with his memory will doubtless find mention in the following pages. I can here only mention one, Mrs. Booth-Gravely, who for years used her unique talents and great influence throughout Burma to raise the large funds necessary to carry on the work. She also has unexpectedly been taken from us by death. Fr. Jackson would have gladly acknowledged the devoted help she gave to him and his work.

And now what is to be his monument? It must of course be the carrying on of his work for the 25,000 blind of Burma. That work was, first and foremost, work for God. The work that is done in his memory must be within reach of the Altar that continually proclaims to the world its need of redemption and nothing less, and at which it was his greatest joy to serve. Thank God, as I write, a priest has been found to go out to continue the work he began. We look back thankfully to what he did. We look forward hopefully to the building that is to be raised on the foundations he laid so well.

✱ R. S. FYFFE,

Bishop.

November, 1932.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS.

WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON was born on March 13th, 1889, at Tudor House, Greenwich, but within a short time the family moved further out of the town to Stobcross Lodge, Crooms Hill, to a house opposite the park and nearly on to Blackheath. It was at this Stobcross Lodge that the family life centred for the next twenty years.

Mr. and Mrs. Jackson had nine children, of whom William Henry was the sixth, and it is significant that in a family where pet names or abbreviations were not encouraged this sixth child was always known as "Willie." One childish illness followed another during the first months of Willie's life, and it was a tragic climax when at eighteen months it was discovered that the sight of one eye had gone. A growth was diagnosed and the eye removed, and a year later the second eye had to be taken away. It was small wonder that the surgeon declared the little boy would never grow up. Willie never remembered having had the gift of sight.

Meanwhile the baby's baptism had got delayed, and it was not till a new sister* arrived that it took place—a double event—at the old parish church of St. Alphege, where Mr. Jackson, the father, was vicar's warden to the Rev. Brooke Lambert. This was on February 7th, 1891.

Mr. R. S. Jackson was a solicitor, and came of a Kentish family whose home was at Sittingbourne. One of the family names, Tress—Mr. Jackson's mother was a Miss Tress—had its original form in de Tracy, a line descended from the Sir William whose mistaken loyalty to King Henry the Second has branded him through the ages.

As a lad Mr. Jackson entered the Merchant Service as a first-class apprentice and went round the world in a sailing vessel, and he tells many a story of those long months at sea and how he rounded Cape Horn. He did not, however, pursue his career at sea, though the same spirit which took him over the ocean has led him to tackle life with that vital venturous outlook which he handed on to his son.

In 1878 Mr. Jackson married Mary Ann Bell, whose father, John Bell, M.A.(Lond.), owned

* The present writer.

Cambridge House School, Blackheath, and came of a Cumbrian stock of schoolmasters.

Miss Bell was a brilliant girl, and in the days when girls and examinations did not usually go together was amongst the first who sat for the Cambridge Local Examinations. But it was music she loved best, and she pursued her musical studies in Paris. However, home ties called her as she was the only girl, and at home she stayed until called on herself to take up the duties of a wife and mother—duties which for over fifty years she so wonderfully carried out. Her love of music she handed on to all her children, and her talent to several; but Willie had a creative genius as well, and his music was his great joy and solace in life. The relationship between Willie and his mother was naturally a very dear one. Indeed, it was the only earthly tie that received any consideration, apart from anything directly concerning his work. When the call to Burma came, the severance of their companionship was the only fact that in any way militated against immediate acceptance. And there is no doubt that her death just after his last serious operation was a factor in his loosening his hold on life and following her in a few months' time.

In this large family the youngest of the nine

died as a baby, and Willie's immediate companions in the nursery were his younger sister and brother, Mary and George. The "three little ones," as they were called, were never aware that one of them was different from the others. Certainly Willie slept in his mother's room, but that was only looked on as a most fortunate occurrence. Occasionally discussions of dentist appointments or other similar to-be-avoided appointments were heard, and childish plans for circumvention might be made! In the adjoining dressing-room slept Dorothy, the next eldest of the children, and night after night Dorothy and Willie used to go to beast-land together. There they would consort with "horny jeests" and other strange creatures, but in Willie's bed already there was a small menagerie. Elephant was there, and camel; duck and rabbit, and, above all, monkey—monkey whose fur was worn right away down to his kid skin, but beloved more than any. It was monkey who was taken to see the Queen. Towards the end of Queen Victoria's reign Willie's mother decided that the children must be able to say that they had seen the great Queen. So one morning early they set out for the Green Park to see the royal lady on her morning drive. Three were taken, but all unbeknown a fourth



William Jackson as a child with his sister, Dorothy.
(This photograph was taken before he lost his eyesight.)

was there, and just as her Majesty's carriage passed "monkey" was suddenly produced from inside Willie's sailor blouse and waved triumphantly at the Queen!

In the nursery trust in Willie was tremendous. It was Willie who was not afraid of the fierce old cock in the fowl run (Willie, too, who put the wooden cross over the grave of Tamey the little brown hen). Willie could end a quarrel quite quickly by seizing the violent one and just holding him firmly till the fury subsided. Never was he known to cry at the usual tumbles or the more than usual number of bumps he encountered. Then all the really first-class adventures were planned in that mischief-loving brain. What finer fun than sliding down the glass roof of the conservatory which stretched away from under the nursery window! No matter if a leg went through just as you got to the bottom, you had got there! And then what finer vantage ground could there be than the top of a chimney pot on the "Cottage" in the garden? An unresisting younger brother agreed as he dragged a chair up for further comfort, and a trembling mother daren't suggest otherwise at least until the miscreants were safely on the ground once more.

The garden and the "Cottage" were the chief

educative features of Willie's childhood. He knew every inch of the large garden at Stobcross, climbed all the trees, scaled the walls, and knew all the best nooks for hide and seek, and daily grew in utter fearlessness. There was the old mulberry tree on which the first lessons in climbing were learnt; and then the fir tree and arch-apple tree and Trinity pear tree with three strong straight trunks. The roof of the summer-house was another spot where many dramas were enacted, and the eagle monument and "gravestone" (granite memorials to a former resident) made splendid fortresses or bases for mud-pie modelling in quieter moments.

Next door to Stobcross was the Roman Catholic church of Our Lady Star of the Sea, with its presbytery and day-schools and large Ursuline convent for girls. Twice a day we heard the Angelus : Sunday by Sunday we would hear the "little bell" (the sacring bell) and wonder what it was : and year by year we would lean out of our bedroom windows each Sunday evening of the early summer, on the look out for the wonderful May processions in the adjoining grounds, particularly the one at Corpus Christi. We knew this as the name, but were never told, and little dreamed, of its true significance ; and we craned

our necks so as not to miss the wonderfully vested central figure—"the one who carried the looking-glass"—describing to Willie the whole spectacle as it passed. How often this must have come back to him in later days, when richness in imagery meant so much to him in his own worship and ministrations.

Everything that the other brothers and sisters did, he must do, and when a family bicycle was acquired, nothing would satisfy him till he, too, could ride. It is one of his father's chief memories to this day the sight of Willie careering round the garden on his iron steed. Every turn and twist of the old paths and lawns was gauged to a nicety. He would go round the whole garden—angels to right of him, angels to left of him, must have been—full speed down the little hill, past the summer-house, round the corner safely, past the conservatory, to end up in through the doorway into the old stable-yard, ducking his head at the right moment and quite indifferent to the step which had to be negotiated *en route*. Later in his college days he used to enjoy long cycle rides, with one hand on his companion's shoulder, and there was nothing about the mechanism of a cycle that he did not understand: he could take a machine to pieces with every confidence and put

it together again. This delicacy in handling extended to clocks, sewing machines, electric bells, *etc.*, and his mechanical ingenuity found many outlets. Himself never a sound sleeper, he would waken very early and require an accomplice for a foray on the larder prior to a camp breakfast at 5.30 at the bottom of the garden. Problem—how could he rouse his younger brother without awaking the household? So he devised a contraption with an old alarm clock and weights and pulleys, whereby when the clock went off—minus bell—the bedclothes would be lifted up!

Mr. and Mrs. Jackson were anxious that Willie should be given every advantage to fit him for life in spite of his handicap. At five years old he was taught the Moon system of reading by an old blind tutor, Mr. Bradford. This is a very simple system, chiefly used as finger training for the young or for people who lose their sight in later life. Mr. Bradford's *régime* was a short one, for he had an apt pupil, and a governess, Miss Bartlett, was found who could teach the more comprehensive system of Braille. Miss Bartlett writes that she found a very eager pupil awaiting her at Stobcross. He learned to read and write the Braille, to work sums on the special arithmetic board, and to study all the usual

subjects. His memory work was good, especially recitation and mental arithmetic, and visitors to the nursery would be regaled with *Papa's Letter* or *Boys' Rights*, or called upon to think of a number, double it, and so on breathlessly to the end, till they were told the answer long before they had reached it themselves. Willie learnt the piano in these early days, and though he discontinued actual lessons after a few years, his mastery of the instrument was far above the average.

A ready imagination at his work enabled him to form pictures in his mind in a wonderful way, but he often said he wished there were pictures in Braille, *i.e.* raised, like those in ordinary printed books. It was recalling this, no doubt, that made it one of his earliest efforts in Burma to emboss raised pictures for his boys. Visitors to the Blind School, Kemendine, were allowed to emboss one of these raised pictures for themselves and take it away as a memento of their visit. Also one of his last activities was to secure for blind English readers a Braille edition of *Punch*.

CHAPTER II.

“LEARNING TO BE BLIND.”

It was in 1900 that Willie first ventured forth into the larger world of boarding school life. With the courage characteristic of all her plans for him, his mother now let him go from her own sheltered care to become a pupil at the Royal Normal College for the Blind, Upper Norwood. The head of the college then was Dr. Francis Campbell, afterwards knighted, who with his very able wife and his son “Mr. Guy” had studied in America and brought thence the latest methods for training children handicapped by blindness. The curriculum was as nearly as possible in line with that of the ordinary public school. Besides his studies, Willie learnt the games—“gym,” swimming, and sports generally—that stood him in such good stead in his relationship with his “sons,” both here in England and, later on, in his school in Burma. The physical training at the college hardened his physique, developing in him great muscular strength and powers of physical endurance. *Musica Lux in Tenebris* was the motto of the college, and when Willie

moved up from the primary department to the main school, he mixed with many who were specialising in music. The principal had written strongly recommending that he, too, should specialise—speaking of his excellent ability in that direction. This was not to be, but he acquired such technique of both theory and practice as to enable him to fulfil his creative instinct of composition, both in singing and piano work. And he revelled in the many first-class concerts at the Crystal Palace to which the students were taken, and where they became familiar with all the best music and the leading artistes of the day.

Letters home from Norwood bore witness to a variety of interests : rowing on the lake (skating when frozen !) ; the old duck thereon ; gardening ; conker fights ; “ gym ” displays, and so on. Midnight feasts, roasting chestnuts on the gas stove, and other similar pranks did not always meet with the approval of the authorities, and once even it was suggested that his absence might be more welcome than his presence ! But a well-timed apology and a solemn assurance that he would mend his ways was accepted, and he worked steadily on till he gained his London Matriculation in the summer of 1907.

In debating and literary activities he was a keen partaker. He wrote to his mother, "I wonder if I told you about my intention to get hold of our Reading Union. Well, you will be interested to hear that I have not only got all my five nominees on to the committee, but have got the chairmanship of the same myself. (Those who worked with Willie as Father Jackson in Burma will recognize this as typical of his idea of a committee, though a committee of one was even more to be preferred!) I have already passed many revolutionary measures, and, amongst other things, have established a *Reading Union Magazine*." A fortnight later he wrote, "The first number of the new magazine came out to-day."

It is strange, on looking back, that all through these early years and school days Willie showed no particular interest in religion or Church life. It was not till just before his eighteenth birthday that he was confirmed, and he wrote at the time, "There was nothing very miraculous in the course of my decision; still, I do feel that there was more in it than mere force of circumstances. I feel as if someone had been praying for me." He was confirmed at St. John's Church, Norwood, by Bishop Pereira. Up to this time Willie had

had serious thoughts of studying law in one or other of its branches. For some long time the Bar attracted him, but after his confirmation he resolved to be ordained and from then onwards he never swerved from his resolution.

On leaving Norwood it was decided that Willie should go up to Oxford. Oxford was chosen partly because there were already a number of other sightless men there; also, there was a possible bursary to be obtained—the Fawcett Memorial, in memory of the blind postmaster-general. The bursary awarded, the next thing was to decide on what college for residence, and for this purpose he and his eldest brother John went the round of the colleges to enquire what chances of admission there were. Some eighteen colleges were visited before Wadham was decided on, for twenty-five years ago blindness was looked on as a greater handicap than now.

There was no room in college to begin with, so rooms were found in Blackhall Road for the first term, and preparations made for taking up residence. No one must go up to see him in. He would hang his own pictures, thank you; do his own unpacking, and settle himself in generally. Part of his preparations were unique, for he had purchased a large-scale map of the town and got

his eldest sister to outline the features variously. For instance, the river was marked in thick darning wool, the railway in silk thread, the High in cotton, his own road and the walk to Wadham in something else, till all strategic points were clearly delineated that he might find his own way about. So set himself on always choosing the harder part, he did not always realize how hard it was for others to stand by and let him do it.

In his first letter he wrote :

“Just a line to assure you that I have arrived safely, and am even more comfortable and at home than I could have expected in so short a time. . . . I have had two journeys to coll. already and have been able to find the way quite well.”

And then :

“My first evening I had S. and Sm. and W. in to tea. I was awfully bored by pouring a quantity of milk into the sugar basin ! . . . Last night I went into Hall for dinner. I had some fried whiting first, but it was chock full of bones, and after manfully swallowing a dozen I gave it up. . . . I was out to tea one day with W. and some of his friends, when, having finished my pipe, I strode boldly to

the fireplace and knocked my ash out—on to a plate of muffins which was down in the fender to keep warm for some latecomers !”

These little *contretemps* left the young fresher quite undaunted in his efforts to enter into the normal social life of college. A fellow undergraduate, I.O.W., a man of the same year, wrote of him :

“Two things made Willie Jackson at Oxford. One was his pluck, and the other was his amazing sense of humour which enabled him to rise above his disability and even get some fun out of it. He always determined to be as other men, and took a delight in sweeping difficulties away.”

For his work he had to have a “reader,” for of course very few of the text-books were in Braille. A prodigious memory, combined with a capacity for immediately discerning and dismissing irrelevant matter, supplemented the “reader’s” efforts. An amanuensis was allowed for examinations, but his typewriter was the usual medium for all written work. On one occasion he wrote :

“I did a rather foolish thing this week. Warden (‘Joey’ Wells) had invited me to take

tea with him and I suddenly remembered that I had not accepted. So I wrote in a mighty hurry and sent it without getting it looked at. When I turned up to a logic exam. a day or so after, I found that I had brought a Latin paper instead of the first sheet of my logic. When I began to excuse myself to my tutor he said, 'Oh, Mr. Jackson. I have that sheet, the Warden sent it to me. You replied to an invitation of his on the back of it.' As the Warden is the great logic man, I felt rather silly !''

It was a great relief when room was found in college for him his second term. He wrote : "I am glad about it as nothing else, not excepting the joy of reading my first publication." (This was a poem in the *Oxford Times*.)

At the beginning of term he wrote :

"Settling down here has afforded me considerable fun. On the first evening I thought I had better impress my scout with a due sense of my capacity, so announced that I should unpack my trunk and set up my type-writing table myself. I felt rather sick when I found that I had omitted to pack my screwdriver, but I thought that by my announcement I had



A family group with friends.
(William is on the left, near his father and mother.)

cut off all possibility of delay, so set to and got it undone and set up with the aid of my chipped chisel!”

He shared the attentions of a very faithful scout—Arthur. “My scout is a very decent man,” he wrote. “I frightened him out of his life yesterday morning by leaping out of my bedder window as a short cut to chapel.” However, all this show of independence did not deter Arthur from doing his best to protect such a wayward youth from himself.

The first three years at Oxford Jackson took the Modern History School, getting a second-class. Nearing the time of his finals he wrote: “. . . I really cannot scrape up another thing to say, unless you would like to have a detailed account of the history for any particular *day* in the year 1641!”

Braille is a cumbersome medium, and the amount of sheer labour involved in the three years can be gathered in a measure by one reference in a home letter: “I have to prepare a paper for a historical society for Friday night, of which the bare writing—as it has to be Braille—will take about seven hours.” The following story also is an illustration of the sort of thing Jackson was up against.

I.O.W. writes :

“One Saturday evening some of us wanted to play bridge. Jackson would have liked to, but insisted he had a long and important essay to do for his tutor. We argued and wrangled, but he won and he promised to look in when he had finished. At 11.30 he hurried in with a sheaf of foolscap straight from his typewriter. I used to read his stuff through for him, see that the papers were in order, and so on. He came in virtuously and triumphantly like the ‘village blacksmith’ . . . but alas! all the pages, about twenty of them, were perfectly blank. . . . And then he remembered he had thoroughly spring-cleaned his typewriter that afternoon and forgotten to replace the ribbon! We played bridge after all to console him!”

Jackson's capacity for work was amazing, as was fully revealed later on in Burma. It had a very definite beginning, as can be seen by this extract from a letter :

“. . . I have recently decided to begin developing my personal equipment on a new line: that of acquiring desirable traits of character. The one that I have on hand just

now is energy : never saying you haven't time for anything, you know. It's really only the person who is never constantly occupied who makes the excuse of not having time for this and that and the other. In fact, I've only just lately succeeded in convincing myself that there are twenty-four hours in the day. It seems likely, too, that if one keeps the day full, that practice will teach discrimination between the pleasures that are worth while squeezing in and those that are only cheap ones.”

CHAPTER III.

THE CALL TO BURMA.

In his fourth year at Oxford Jackson read Theology, again obtaining a second-class.

After a year at Leeds Theological College he was ordained on St. Thomas' Day, 1912, to a title offered to him by his vice-principal, who just at that time had resigned and become vicar of Ilford.

His four and a half years' ministry at Ilford and a nine months' ministry at Holy Trinity, Hoxton, were times of intense activity, the strain of which his health was not infrequently incapable of sustaining. It is not possible to tell the story here, but his ministry bore fruit. Two of his workers followed him into the mission field, and when he died one of them undertook single-handed the task of carrying on the whole work of the Mission to the Blind of Burma.

Burma first came into Fr. Jackson's life when in 1904 his eldest brother's friend, W. C. B. Purser, went out for missionary work to Rangoon under the S.P.G. It did not remain in his upper consciousness at all, although, writing home in 1909,

Mr. Purser had said, "William's progress is of great interest to me. I wonder if he will ever become a missionary and teach the thousands of blind of India or China. . . ." However, his interest in the country was naturally stimulated when in 1911 his "God-sister" married Mr. Purser and joined him in his work out there.

In 1913, when he was priested, he wrote asking his brother-in-law's advice as to considering the mission field in his future plans; but for the time being he immersed himself in his parish work in Ilford, which steadily captured his whole being, his zeal only increasing as the months of war brought the inevitable burdens of understaffing and overworking.

"With the condition of things here," he wrote, "I am tempted to give up all thoughts of migrating for the present. The one thing which weighs against my adopting that course definitely is the consideration of this work amongst the blind folks of your diocese. I cannot easily throw off the idea that the call of that work, and my possible qualification for it, ought to be given the chance of coming together; and it is very certain that if this is the course meant for me, God will see to the work here."

At the same time he wrote to Dr. Fyffe, the Bishop of Rangoon :

“Reverend Father,

I understand that my brother-in-law, W. Purser, has had some conversation with you about myself, and that you are not unfavourable to the idea of its being possible for me to find a piece of God's work to do in your diocese. Parochial circumstances here make it difficult for me to consider my departure from a sphere where labour is much needed ; but I have for so long believed that God is calling me to work in the foreign field that I feel bound to investigate anything that may seem to be an indication of his will for me. I should therefore esteem it a great kindness, my father, if you would let me have some message which would help me. . . . I am necessarily fairly specialized in dealing with blind people ; but am doubtful of my capacities as a linguist, though they have had no conclusive test. As far as I am able to judge at this stage of life, my worldly ambitions are *nil*. . . . I hope that I shall always be content simply to live for the Master's work.”

Meanwhile the blind work at Kemendine had

been embarked upon by Mr. Purser with no funds, no buildings, no workers; a venture of faith as a practical object lesson to the spoon-fed Burmese Christians who were in danger of thinking that the study of English was the be-all and end-all of their Christian Faith. The Government Education Department took notice of the work after some two years, and the urgency of specialized assistance became obvious. Mr. Purser went on leave in 1916-1917, and things began to move. The S.P.G. expressed itself as willing to pay passage and furlough allowance if the necessary worker presented himself to the Board in the usual way; and on the "worker" presenting himself they reported that they were "very much pleased indeed with Mr. Jackson."

"It was on Corpus Christi (June 7th) that I clinched to come to Burma," he wrote, and in little over three months after that date he was on his way out in the company of his brother-in-law, sailing from Liverpool on October 3rd, 1917.

The first voyage out to Burma was welcomed by Fr. Jackson as his one opportunity of being "on active service." It was at the height of the great submarine warfare, so they left harbour a convoy of eleven merchantmen under sealed orders as to route, and with an escort of six

destroyers. With the usual gleam of humour it was noted that three-fourths of the passengers on board were missionaries! An unprecedented proportion! Total number of passengers four!

From the outset the study of Burmese was made to feature largely in the daily programme of what promised to be an unusually extended voyage. The day's routine was given as: 7.0, bath; 7.45 mass; 8.0 walk and cigarette till 9.0; breakfast, 9.0; mattins, followed by Burmese and intermittent walking, with possibly forty winks, till 1.0 lunch. After lunch, light reading, walking, and intermittent Burmese till high tea at 5.30. After tea, walking, light reading, a little music, and evensong. To most travellers the voyage from Liverpool and Rangoon is looked on in the light of a necessary evil, their sole desire to be either at one end or the other—possibly both! To Fr. Jackson a voyage of any sort was a nightmare. The confined quarters and unfamiliar surroundings weighing on him only less than a terrible feeling of physical insecurity, which almost overwhelmed him at times. And yet, did any of his fellow passengers ever realize it, one wonders? Putting aside his unbidden fears, he looked on these long weeks at sea as a time of trust as much as any other time, and he

gave of himself freely both in social intercourse and in pastoral care.

The convoy touched at Gibraltar and a home letter was despatched. He wrote that he was getting on pretty well with Burmese, could read the Lord's Prayer with tolerable understanding and understandability, and had committed to memory about two hundred and fifty words. Of course, all correspondence was rigidly censored and no names of places called at or description of route allowed.

Just before reaching Port Said two of the ships in the convoy were sunk on two successive days. On the second day there was a regular battle for two or three hours, and he referred to the terrific noise and feeling of helplessness : "I am bound to say that on the whole I prefer aerial bombardment. . . . But I am confident for myself that my present security is due to providential interposition, once more in a lengthening chain of such, which has marked my call to Burma all through." The haven of Port Said was doubly welcome, as may be imagined.

"Few things have I enjoyed more," his letter says, "than our little trip ashore at Port Said. The feeling of freedom, the hearing

once more of familiar sounds and the children. . . . I have met some saucy boys in my time, but one small Egyptian—or perhaps Greek—whom we encountered takes the bun ! He was offering matches for sale, so W.C.B.P. asked him the price. His immediate response in the prettiest broken English was, ‘Toss you ! Bob or Tanner ! ’ ”

Nothing else very eventful occurred and the voyage took little over the normal scheduled time after all. November came with All Saints’-tide, and “some chocolate was sent down to the apprentice boys on All Hallow-e’en. . . . On All Saints’ Day we managed to create a strong, quiet atmosphere of festivity, and also observed the solemnities of All Souls’ Day with due decorum. Burmese progressed, W.C.B.P. being an indefatigable coach, and before the end of the voyage he wrote :

“I have got the ground pretty well cleared for the reconstruction of the system for embossing Burmese. We have used this opportunity (*i.e.*, the long voyage) of making an unflagging spiritual retreat, and I shall never cease to value it as a most strategic season of consolidation. . . . W. has proved

to be a most cheerful, untiringly attentive, equable, and inspiring travelling companion. . . . We are feeling the stir of excitement and eager anticipation of getting into the 'haven where we would be,' and it will be good to get once more into the full-blooded life and activity of the world and the Church; but for my own part it will be with just a tinge of regret that I leave the sheltered routine life and quite undisturbed activity of the old SS. *Burma*, more specially as I see no reason to suppose that I shall ever again have a voyage under such favourable conditions."

It is interesting to compare W.C.B.P.'s comments at the end of this voyage :

"I have never enjoyed a voyage so much, or rather never been so little fed up. There has not been one dull moment, and it has been mostly on account of W. (Fr. Jackson). He has been a great inspiration, and ought to be a great inspiration to us all in Burma."

They landed on November 8th, receiving a warm welcome at the quay from the flock of St. Michael's Mission, Kemendine.

CHAPTER IV.

IN JOURNEYINGS OFT.

In his second week in Burma, Fr. Jackson wrote :

“I have taken part in all the life of the schoolboys as far as possible, grubbing with them on the floor, playing with them, studying with them, taking them for walks, washing their clothes for them, and trying to get into their mentality. . . . Soon I must tackle the re-organizing of the curriculum—then they will squeal ; at present they don’t know what work means ! . . . Yesterday I was helping the boys to scrub the floor of their new dormitory, and it was a source of great amusement and delight to them to discover that if they ‘accidentally’ scrubbed my feet they could make me protest ! Of course, the idea of ticklish feet was quite a new one to them. . . .

“On the night of St. Nicholas’ Day I went over to the boys’ dormitory and I slept with them. I borrowed a Burmese costume, mat, and blanket, and did the thing in proper style.

Great excitement in the morning when I turned up to mattins and Mass in full Burmese war paint ! Incidentally, sleeping without a mosquito net is rather a painful process !

“From the beginning of the Christmas holidays I have taken up complete rustication. That is to say, I have lived and slept and talked and played with only the Burmese children. So important do I consider a rapid acquisition of the language and of an insight into the racial characteristics, that I have rigidly cut myself off from English work and have refused six invitations to European functions.”

On this Christmas Eve in Burma he celebrated a midnight Mass in English, which was the first, he thought, ever to be celebrated in English in the country. On Christmas morning he was able to read the Gospel in Burmese, his first public utterance in the language as he called it, apart from having baptized three of his blind boys the day before.

He then described his first visit to the great Buddhist shrine, the Shwe Dagon pagoda, which dominates the city of Rangoon. He took his boys :

“We had a very interesting visit to the Shwe Dagon. There are a number of strolling minstrels habitually to be found there, and as we came to each one we all sat on the ground and listened awhile, and then I made each of them perform and show me his instrument and its use. The boys were amused, and I learned a great deal.”

These first weeks were full of new experiences, and Fr. Jackson was not one to sit and just welcome such experiences as came along; he went forth to find them.

“I had a most eventful week last week,” he wrote, “. . . ending up by walking out of school with just a handbag and a water bottle, and visiting half a dozen or so places up the line about two hundred miles away. That really was rather a joke! D. was ill (David, his Burmese headmaster), and everybody else away except one youth who was afraid to tackle the jungle alone with me. So I cut off alone under the guardianship of St. Michael and St. Gabriel, and it came out jolly well too. My Burmese was just enough to carry me through without much margin and with one

or two tight squeaks, and I got a lot of insight into Burmese life and appreciation of Burmese hospitality.”

The following little set of pictures was written home to his mother soon after his coming to Burma, with the idea of providing a general setting of the sort of thing he was constantly experiencing in those early days of going up and down the country to fetch in pupils. He must have covered many thousands of miles in similar circumstances, for from the outset he always made a point of going himself so that he might gain the immediate confidence of the particular small child he was after, and reassure the parents that he had no cannibalistic intentions ! So many were the strange rumours that were floating round in the early days of the Blind School.

TABLEAUX VIVANTS.

1. *Exodus. 8.0 p.m., Friday.*

“Six persons trailing down the road to the station : *pong yi*,* Nicholas the adopted disciple, David the school teacher, John, Thomas,

* Burmese for monk.

and Michael the schoolboys. Two leather bags, and three bundles of clothes. The *pongyi*, in English canonicals and sun hat, carrying one of the bundles over his shoulder. Pertinent remarks from Nicholas about carrying home the washing !”

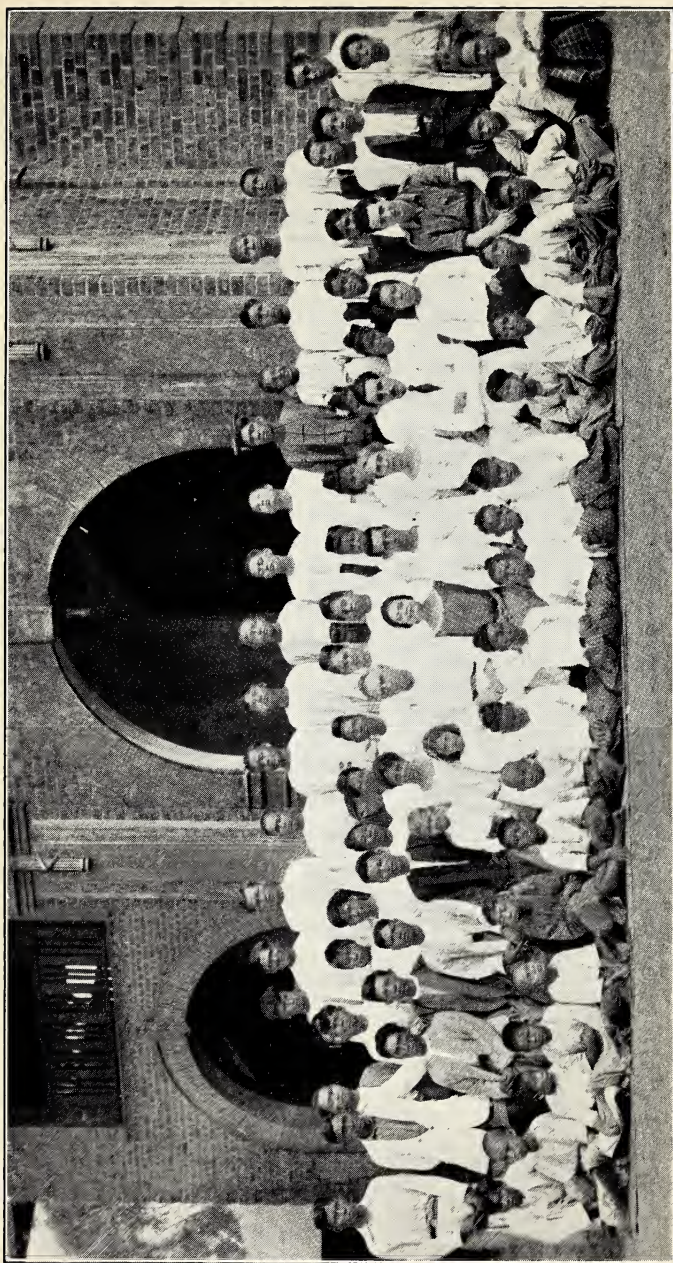
2. *On first stage. 11.30 p.m.*

“Third-class railway carriage crowded. Party separated. Behold the *pongyi*, collar and boots discarded, cross-legged in the corner on a very hard seat, being fed by a Hindu with quarters of orange from which all skin and pips are punctiliously removed : we learn that he is a shoemaker, but cannot see his hands.”

3. *Ways that won't part. 3.0 a.m.,*

Saturday.

“A dark and straggly railway junction at which three of the party should take a local train. An hour's diligent search and enquiry prove that the local train is already overcrowded, and it is decided to take them along with the main expedition which is to move forward again at 5.50 a.m.”



The Mission to the Blind of Burma.

4. *Second stage. 4.0 a.m.*

“A very dirty third-class compartment in the waiting train, with an unflushable lavatory in the corner ; but we have it to our six selves and we have room to stretch. The two smallest are overlapped so as to fit on to one bench, and the rest disposed of. Behold the *pongyi* on the rack, which is eighteen inches wide, fifteen inches from the roof, and a quarter of an inch in dust and other adhesions. The thermometer must have dropped to about 70° and it strikes cold. The children are busily munching indigestibles ; but we will sleep till the train starts ; aye, and afterwards if its jolting does not dislodge us !”

5. *Destination. Mid-day.*

“The Burmese house of a very well disposed Eurasian pleader. We have arrived ; we have exchanged news ; we have bathed in tepid water ; we have breakfasted on fish and mince and eggs and what-not ; we have declared ourselves fit for a forty-eight hours’ stretch of work ; we have taken up a Burmese book to study in the meantime ; we are fast asleep on the floor !”

6. *Sanctuary. 6.30 a.m., Sunday.*

“An upper chamber in our host’s house; a table in the alcove window adorned with flowers and candles. The small Communion vessels of the travelling priest set out, and a borrowed Burmese gong for sanctuary bell. David is serving and the congregation, composed of the travelling party and the household, are sitting in a semi-circle on the floor. It is the Burmese Mass for the third Sunday after the Epiphany, and for the moment nothing else counts. We do not know where our jungle search will lead us to-day; we cannot be sure of getting any meals after breakfast; we cannot tell where we shall sleep to-night, or when we shall return to headquarters; but for the moment nothing counts, it is the sanctuary.”

7. *The way made smooth. 11.0 a.m.*

“Here are four miles of made-up road and a couple of two-wheeled horse-traps, or what remains of them after much service. Seats about eight inches wide and mostly made of edges and corners. Through the middle runs the axle of the high wheels, and it acts

as a violent automatic massage vibrator for one's feet if movements be sudden or incautious. From time to time readjustments are made to defeat the cramp, but these must always be made with reference to the horse, lest we should see-saw him into the air; reminiscent this of 'trim the boat.' Our luggage reduced now to field equipment, that is to say, the one remaining portmanteau sometimes reposes in the bottom of the trap, sometimes sits in the road behind, according to the extent of the pitching fore and aft."

8. *Stony places. 1.0 p.m., onwards.*

"Temperature 115° or thereabouts; country open, very open; ground made up of holes and chasms, separated by cracks and crevices; party straggling about two hundred yards from guide in front, to *pong-yi* in rear; those of us who have slippers must stoop frequently to disengage them from the cracks in the earth baked hard as rock, and one whose shoes are too expensive to be treated inconsiderately carries them in his hands. Those of us who rely upon our natural 'understandings,' have finished with toes and soles, are

speculating on the advisability of crawling or rolling along when our heels give out; all of us emulate the historic Agag who came 'walking delicately.' Here a pause in a shady enclosure at the edge of a village for coconuts, with untethered bullocks snorting battle challenges on either side across our recumbency. Then we enter a village, greeted by the howls of the little ones, who are as frightened by the unfamiliar appearance of the white man as we may suppose English village children would be by the sudden advent of a fearsome painted savage.

"Now an hour's monotonous trudging has convinced us of the entirely unsensational character of the country; and anon we have come up to a group, the central figure of which is a *dacoit* (bandit) just hunted down, who has six shot wounds gained in an affray last night when his gang attacked a village and lost their leader, shot dead by the police."

9. *Night operations. 1.30 a.m., Monday.*

"The immediate cause of waking is that one of the ten sleepers has turned over with more than usual violence, and the whole

bamboo floor is creaking and groaning in consequence ; but there are subsidiary causes. The blanket which has been turned sideways so as to cover three of us, has left the feet exposed to the cool air and the attentions of wandering mosquitoes. The coolness of the lower extremities is compensated, though not mitigated, by the fact that one arm and one leg of the snoring Nicholas on the right are searching sporadically for a convenient resting place on our chest, and in so doing have to compete with an arm and a leg of John on the left, whose grinding teeth and frequent vociferations suggest that his dreams are reminiscent of the toiling day. When we have decided that the rustling in the wall is only rats, that the fifty or sixty crowing cocks are not really 'crowing in' the light, that the clamour of dogs is only a canine social and not the notification of robbers, we shall sleep again, lulled by the thought that there will probably be a chance of getting some tea somewhere in the morning, and that there is a reasonable chance of getting some sort of meal in about ten hours' time."

10. Interim measures. 9.30 a.m.

“A wayside railway station. Behold the *pongyi* seated on a wooden box, and in his lap a plaintain leaf containing half the breast and wing of a mal-nourished hen fried in something. His hands are getting greasy, it is true, and there is no immediate prospect of a wash; but it is fifteen hours since last night’s rice, and who shall say but what it may be fifteen to the next? In point of fact it is not so, for we return almost at once to headquarters, where there is unlimited hospitality, water, and rest.”

11. Hope, and hopelessness. 10.0 p.m.

“Only a few hours more and we shall have begun the seven hours’ train journey which will take us back to school. . . . In the meantime we are engaged in gracing an act of pagan piety in the remote village to which we were recently transported by toiling oxen in a lumbering cart. We six Christians are sitting round upon the floor of an unventilated house with some twenty of our fellow villagers, and in the midst is an open-work coffin containing a four days’ corpse covered with ashes. We

are doing our best to talk and laugh down the silence, and somebody has to do it till sunrise ; but an hour of it suffices us and we retire to our own sleeping quarters to sing a few songs to our hostess and her visitors, and so to sleep.”

Later letters gave similar vivid pictures.

“One of my recent tours was a matter of twelve days in the region of Bassein. It included a visit to C. in his parsonage, where I spent five days in high life : lunch parties, fat dinners, *etc.* I spent one evening with Mrs. B. in her ‘Seafarers’ Rest.’ Also we held a garden meeting, at which I delivered a long lecture on my work and raised Rs. 250. The tour also included a visit to a very remote district full of a special kind of fever, notorious for violent highwaymen, and frequently visited by tigers. Then there was a second stay with C. at another of his stations, Henzada, with another meeting, dinner party, *etc.*, raising a matter of Rs. 100. One night was spent in a Burmese house, sleeping in a room about as big as the home dining-room, along with four other men, four boys, two women, two girls, and two babies. It was a little strange to see ‘daddy’ walking

up and down the room with a fractious baby in the middle of the night, singing a weird Burmese cradle song."

"Amongst other of my wanderings during the school holidays, I had to go so far north on one occasion as to get out of the tropics into the temperate zone. We were trying to secure a big contract for the supply of ten thousand baskets, and I found that the local cane dealers were up against me and forcing the price up. I therefore took a rapid decision and set off with a youthful companion of about fourteen years to a town in the middle of the cane-growing jungle, which is a matter of seven hundred miles from Kemendine. There I picked up five tons of cane, arranged for its transport, secured an extra subsidiary contract for a small quantity of the same baskets, and returned to the base. It took nine days there and back, mostly rather dreary railway travelling."

CHAPTER V.

MISSION TO THE BLIND OF BURMA.

At the outset of the work a specially planned building had to be carefully “shepherded” through the course of erection, with unintelligent workmen and conventional architect needing constant warnings not to wander from the original plans so clearly carried in the mind’s eye of the designer. The designing had been of engrossing interest, and besides the usual “guiding” marks in such institutions for the blind—slightly raised marks in the floor at corners or doorways, *etc.*—there was a wide uninterrupted verandah both upstairs and down to allow the boys to take definite exercise without fear of unnecessary bumps or falls such as might be encountered in an ordinary outdoor walk. Windows and doors had to be all hung the same way, so that no unpleasant surprises might be met with if left open. The staircase must be wide enough to avoid collision, and rails put at certain places to indicate direction. All this involved a minute supervision.

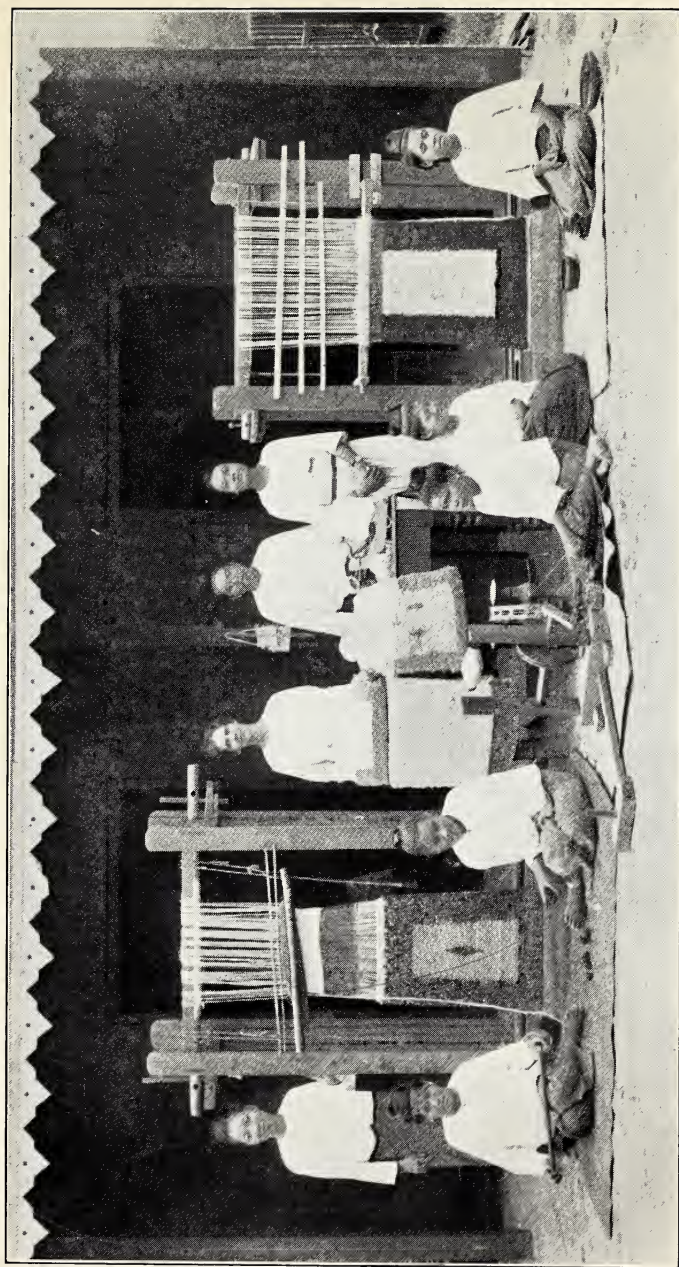
This new home for Fr. Jackson’s boys was ready in July, 1919, and there was no doubt as to the impression that was made at the public

ceremony of its opening. The leading city magnates were attracted, Chinese and Indian, besides Burmese ; large gifts of money were given, stirring speeches made, and thus the work was another step forward.

The hall in the centre of the new building had its many uses, and one of the first of these was a dramatic production to which Fr. Jackson refers in the following :

“The production of our Burmese play on the Conversion of St. Paul at the Michaelmas Conference was in every respect an unqualified success. It bids fair to revolutionize the outlook of the Burmese Church. During the last few days of rehearsal and the four performances, the fame of it spread through the locality—though it was not at all intended for the general public—and the accommodation of our hall for about two hundred audience shrank to insignificance on the last night, when we had six or seven hundred Buddhists clamouring at every door and window for admission, besides our own five hundred Christians.”

Then there was what he called his “Night Club” for the bigger boys, which was chiefly



Blind girls and staff of St. Raphael's Mission.

country dancing to the gramophone and light refreshments ! This was a great privilege, with strictly limited membership except on open nights.

“This year we wound up our Night Club season on a considerable scale ! As there were nearly twice as many uninstructed visitors as there were instructed club members, the dances were not unlike football scrums ; but it was really an enjoyable if somewhat strenuous hour and a half.”

For some long time in the early days Fr. Jackson had to teach both teachers and pupils, and improvise all apparatus. For his Braille printing he added a mangle to the school furniture, much to his own merriment ! And his colleagues at the mission house delighted to tease him on this new departure and offer to take a turn at the handle. Then there were devices and inventions innumerable to be worked out for all the handwork—basket-making, box-making, *etc.* ; it was good to have been there in those days, when each meal-time brought the Rev. Father to the mission house with some fresh gadget for suggestion and approval, and a triumph to be shared when some long pondered over difficulty had been at last solved.

From the beginning there had been one little blind girl attached to the school, and Fr. Jackson could see that the work would have to be balanced by making provision for the training of girls as well as boys. One of our diocesan-trained Anglo-Indian girls had just completed her teacher's training, and was drawn to offer herself for this pioneer task. This was Rose Davidson, and willingly she devoted herself to her little family through many ups and downs, till called to higher service this year.

Another life that was literally given in the service of the girls was that of Agnes Poulton. At an age when most people consider themselves not called on for fresh ventures, she came to Burma with her husband and faced all the discomforts and inconveniences of tropical life in a mission bungalow. During her six years in Burma she gave of herself so unsparingly that when the dread spectre of cholera was abroad she was claimed, and called away within a short twenty-four hours.

At one time there was an attempt to establish the girls' work at Mandalay, as this was the centre of the dry zone, the area where such a large proportion of blindness was to be found. Here with the girls, it was thought, the younger boys

might be first taken in, and then drafted on to Kemendine. But for many reasons it was found not to be practicable, and the plan had to be abandoned.

The girls' work, perforce, has to take more the nature of a hostel or home, rather than anything academical, but, even so, great things are achieved. St. Raphael's School, Moulmein, can turn out good weaving, knitting, basket work, string work, and chair-caning. Moulmein is about one hundred miles from Kemendine, the boys' school centre, but Fr. Jackson used to manage to pay a two or three days' visit there once at least every month.

It was in 1924-25 that the after-care work was enabled to take more definite shape by a grant of £1,000 from the Sir Arthur Pearson Empire Memorial Fund. A block of one-storied dwellings was erected and given the name of St. Dunstan's Hostel, and here some twenty workers could be housed and go daily to the mission workshop. The various arts and crafts pursued in the workshop, combined with the truly marvellous way in which the three R's were being acquired by the schoolboys at this stage, were considered as sufficient material to provide a public exhibition of no small interest. So under the patronage, and

in the presence of His Excellency the Governor of the province, an exhibition and garden party was held and brought in much new interest. A committee of representative public persons had been formed, and their goodwill and energy, followed up as they were by successive committees of persons of goodwill and energy, have carried the Mission to the Blind of Burma through many a financial crisis. One outstanding name in this connexion is that of Mrs. Booth-Gravely. From the first she was president of the *M.B.B. committee, and set about organizing regular concerts, at homes, and benefits for the funds of the mission, her efforts culminating in the establishing of an annual Pansy Day collection for the blind, which could be counted on to add the substantial sum of Rs. 20,000 to the year's receipts. For all this it was fitting that Government should make acknowledgment by bestowing on her the Kaisar-i-Hind medal, but no medal that exists would be commensurate with the human kindness and thought that she bestowed on those for whom and with whom she worked, and her death in 1932 was a great grief to all.

* M.B.B., Mission to the Blind of Burma.

CHAPTER VI.

APAY-GYI.

Apart from the very full daily routine of such specialized work as Fr. Jackson's—beginning with the 6.15 daily Mass, on through every hour of the day, at the disposal of importunate small boys either homesick, or with a hurt or bruise, or bringing something to **“Apay-gyi”* that he simply must “see”—there was the never ending succession of odd jobs that such a man always finds awaiting him. Articles must be written to the papers to bring the blind work before the public notice; visitors at all hours must be welcomed, markets for workshop goods explored, exhibitions, demonstrations, and lectures be arranged. At the end of one of his home letters he wrote :

“I must stop now as I have to go off for some outside baptisms. Also, I have to write a page for *Cook's Guide to Burma* and get off the annual *précis* report for the education

* *“Big Father,”* the name in Burma by which he was always known.

department. All extras, of course ; but then, curiously enough, every day seems to be all extras ! This hot weather is very strenuous, and yet I think there are not many men who can keep it up all along and still wish for twice as many hours in the day."

His care and interest and individual dealing with his boys were intense. As it had been with his English sons, so it now was with his Burmese sons. It was almost magical the way he could foretell how his different "lambs" would react to any particular crises or circumstances in their lives as they came along, and no less wonderful the way he would shepherd them round the difficult corners, and simply never, never let them go, however much the world might count them lost. A Home Office official sent out to Burma by Government to study certain problems dealing with the youth of the country said that Fr. Jackson, more than anyone else, had helped him in his difficult task by the insight he was able to give him into the working of the mind of the Burmese boy.

In January, 1921, he wrote :

"I am tied to a deck-chair and have not been able to say Mass for three weeks now.



Fr. Jackson on the steps of the School.



St. Michael's Church, Kemendine.

The last Mass I said was a votive Mass for the increase of the Church, and I got some of the results of it last night when four out of my heathen pupils came and demanded Holy Baptism. Two of them are specially obdurate youths who have been in touch with Christian teaching for three years."

Fr. Jackson never hurried his pupils into baptism; indeed, one of his little ones was so disappointed at not being received into the fold that he "dipped" himself in the bathing tank, using the sacred invocation of the Trinity. To *Apay-gyi's* great grief this little one died in his own home during the next holidays, and he liked to think that the impromptu baptism sufficed.

Writing home to Fr. Jackson's mother about him, his brother-in-law said :

"W. is under the doctor, but he is amazingly active. . . . I was anxious lest he should feel Sid Law's absence, but at present he enjoys grappling with the problems; his great solace is in his work and in his devotions. I came in from an all-night journey this morning and went straight to church. He was singing the Mass of St. Mark's Day with vibrant voice and radiant face,

thoroughly happy, though I found afterwards he had been up half the night with a sick boy !”

In April, 1922, Jackson wrote :

“We had a very excellent Holy Week and Easter. We added a little more to the Burmese version of *Tenebrae*, though we have only managed half of it even now. . . . We built and set up near the church an almost full-sized model of the holy sepulchre according to the Burmese idea, with bamboo and paper ; and then after the festival we moved it into the middle of the field and burnt it, as is the Burmese custom with anything specially made for religious observance.”

In 1922-23 Fr. Jackson went through a very difficult time. W.C.B.P., who had so far been with him all along, went on furlough, and there was still no young colleague forthcoming to support him at headquarters as he had hoped. The new head of the girls' school had left to be married, and the temporary head had become engaged. An epidemic of typhoid broke out amongst the girls, and was very distressing over a long period ; and Fr. Jackson's own health became very shaky through the long months of the rains.

"All anxiety to hear about the new worker," he wrote; ". . . can't go on for ever like this! Internal combustion too powerful for the gearing. . . . Must have additional cylinder as soon as possible."

Later : "Up to about mid-day each day I loathe Burma and all connected with it, and realize that the whole of this five years odd has been a fantastic waste of time as far as achieving anything that really matters. Then from mid-day onwards I know that I shall never be able to settle down in full efficiency anywhere else, and that it only requires a few more years of patient spending of heart's blood to converting our efforts here into a really solid contribution to the building of the Kingdom."

However, in May, 1923, his leave was due and, taking his headmaster (Saya David), he faced the eight-thousand-mile voyage once more for a few months at home, to try and stimulate interest in his work and look again for a young colleague. It was while he was at home this time that he gave his first broadcast talk, an opportunity which he more than welcomed. Also, he was presented to the Prince of Wales at his old

school at Norwood at their annual prize-giving. The prince had visited Burma the previous cold weather, and Fr. Jackson had ransacked Rangoon for a copy of "God Bless the Prince of Wales" to teach his boys. He was successful in finding it and translated it into Burmese, and this his boys sang lustily from their coign of vantage in one of the stands on the prince's route as he passed through the city.

Sermons, talks, addresses, and interviews filled up the days. The secretary of the Gregorian Society was approached with a view to sifting out the possibilities and best ways of approximating the Burmese characteristic metre into plainsong. For his own satisfaction he called on the superior of the Society of the Divine Compassion in order to try to clear his views on the producing of an apostolic-poverty Order in the Burmese Church.* And he found much refreshment in being able once more to worship in churches where the full ceremonial of the Mass was valued and practised. Meanwhile his hopes

* "I am convinced—humanly speaking—the only way of establishing, to say nothing of extending, the Burmese Church, is the introduction of the monastic and conventual life."

of a fellow-worker were being realized, and the very boy he had set his heart on from the first was now able to come. Sidney Law had been one of the St. Clement's Young Men's Guild from the outset of Fr. Jackson's ministry in Ilford. He had been prepared for confirmation by him, and was altogether very closely in touch with him. So now, when the call came, he answered, though it meant the deliberate giving up of all further material prospects at home. Together then, with their Burmese fellow-worker, they set sail for Burma, arriving in time for Christmas, at Kemendine.

Before appointing his young English colleague finally, he had set out what he considered the primary qualifications for the work :—

- (a) To find a delight in the Catholic Faith and practice.
- (b) To believe that the production of Christian character is a greater sign of efficiency than is success in educational or industrial enterprise.

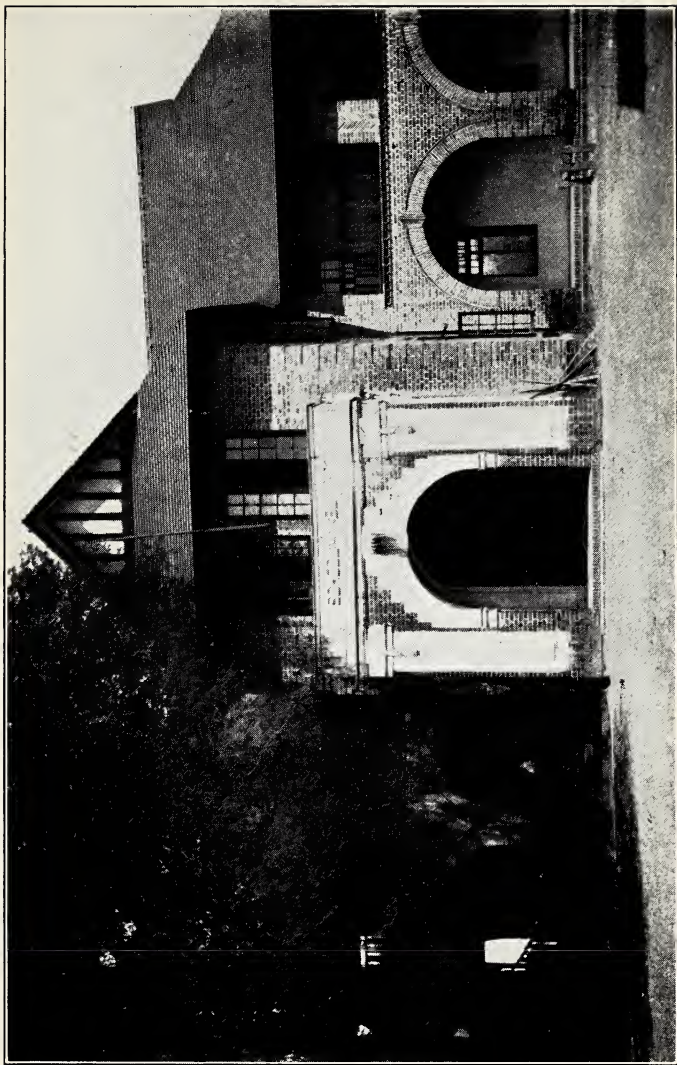
And the remuneration was to be :—

- (a) A great joy in service.
- (b) A share in the pain of the Sacred Heart.

Some of *Apay-gyi's* manifold activities and interests are revealed in the following extracts from his letters home :

“Our Burmese technical instructor has become seriously crippled with arthritis, so I have constituted myself headmaster of the technical department. I now spend my day going the round of our nine departments, pretending I know all about it! These departments are: fancy goods and toys, coir mats, carpentry, chair-caning, basket-making, boot repairing, bamboo work, and box-making. Then, as we have some pupils in the 8th standard for the first time, I have to do a bit of private coaching in euclid and algebra, which involves a good deal of new vocabulary in Burmese.”

“For the first time in the history of Burma a competitive festival of entirely national music was held in Rangoon. It was under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. I entered nine of our boys, the only Christians amongst the fifty odd competitors, and we took a prize. I think it was a great vindication of my policy of encouraging nationalism. The policy so far in the Burmese Church has been to regard



The School for the Blind, Kemendine.

everything national as coming under the ban of heathenism."

"I have been fostering a wave of enthusiasm. . . . We have added six new Burmese Braille MSS. to the library, and completed the printing of the book of the collects of the Church, also the revised edition of the hymn book. I am now proposing to tackle the printing of a Burmese Braille psalter pointed for singing, to plainsong, and have had to commit to memory the fifty odd different modes of chanting which are used in plainsong."

"*Christmas, 1925.*—We are in the middle of Christmas, and are trying to keep up to a rather unusually high standard of celebration set up by the first day. There were over one hundred and fifty people present at the midnight Mass, which shows some development since we started having the service with a congregation of about twenty in 1918. But even more significant was the development in the rendering of the service; we started with a procession to the Crib through the illuminated paths of the compound; we then had the service of *Asperges* (sprinkling of holy water), and then followed the sung Mass with full

music and ceremonial and ninety communicants. This involved the singing of eighteen musical numbers, all of course unaccompanied, and there were only two slight hitches in which I had to come to the rescue of the precentor, who had pitched his notes too high. . . . When we came out, after an hour and forty minutes, Sidney Law and I both had the same impression that we had been living outside time. I sang another Burmese Mass at 7.o, and said an English one at 8.o."

"After Christmas we had school going again in full swing, but made another splash for the Circumcision. I took a party to the Zoo and we had rather a successful visit. We were able to get hold of a docile old elephant whose keeper gave us every facility for handling him all over. One of the bears also proved very friendly, and we were able to stroke him through the bars. No small sensation was caused when I addressed one of the young leopards who came to the front of his cage, and got him to give me his paw through the bars."

"The chief event of this week was the issuing of our new little Burmese hymn book which is my contribution to Burmese Christian poetry. As a matter of fact, there is

little enough in it that I have actually written myself ; my main work in the matter has been the supplying of the driving power and the editing. This book is meant chiefly as a pioneer effort, being the first bit of work in Christian literature which owes nothing to translation, being all original thought and in the national metre." (Many of the tunes also were composed by him.)

CHAPTER VII.

LOOSENING THE BONDS.

In May, 1927, Fr. Jackson had to face the first warning of serious internal trouble. He was operated on without delay in the Rangoon General Hospital and made a wonderfully rapid recovery, being back at Kemendine and present at the Ascension Day Mass just sixteen days after the operation ! This was characteristic of his capacity for controlling "Brother Ass." He could literally rise from a bed of sickness urged by the call of work undone, and be healed as he went. One night the inmates of the mission house were called by some of the blind boys : "Please come to *Apay-gyi*, he won't stop singing !" His brother-in-law went to him and found him with a temperature of 104°. He attended to him and stayed till he was quiet, and the answer to anxious enquiries in the morning was, "Oh, he's all right; he was at the 6 o'clock Mass this morning !" Sleeplessness was his natural enemy from childhood days, and the over active mind rarely had its legitimate respite at night.

Braille books, arriving from England weekly from the National Lending Library for the Blind, were a priceless boon in the long wakeful hours, and they were looked for eagerly each mail day—only second to his home letters. He had no bed, but lay on a mat on the floor with a pile of these books by his side.

Letters to his mother.

“In a book which I have just read, I came across the rather obvious but significant epigram : ‘A man may have two or three wives and quite a lot of children, but he never has but one mother. . . .’

Yours sonfully.”

On finding himself free to go home and complete the family circle at his parents’ Golden Wedding in 1928 :

“There is so much to be got in hand before I leave that I dare not risk expenditure of time in day-dreaming. But now that it is no longer a matter of weighing up ‘oughts and ought not,’ there is a great longing upon me to be back amongst you all. One more letter from here, and then perhaps a cable from Marseilles, and then I shall be on the door-

step! Ha! ha! fatted calves! old crusted port! golden weddings, and what not! . . . But it's going to be rather a business getting off. The only things I have found so far towards my home outfit are a pair of braces and one sock suspender!"

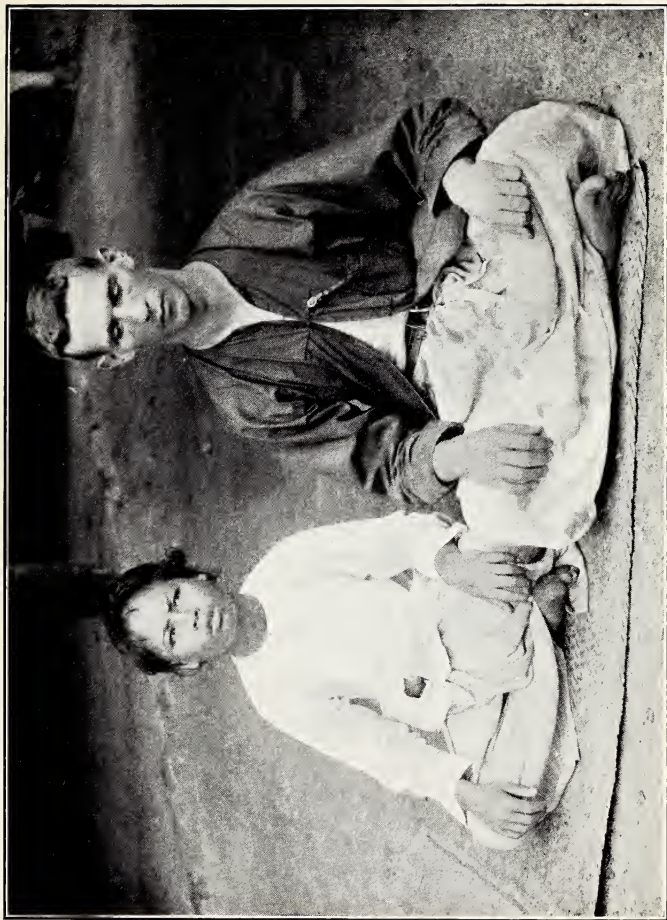
May 7th.

"I offered a special Mass of praise this morning for our *Pater Familias*, putting him down as seventy-eight. I'm not sure that it might not be eighty-seven, but what is a decade more or less to our G.O.M.!"

August 26th, his parents' wedding day.

"When I went into church this morning to say Mass I found that the white vestments were out, whereas on Mondays we generally have the purple ones for a votive Mass for all sick folk. Upon investigation I was informed that I had put down a votive thanksgiving for to-day in the sacristan's list for the week. I considered the matter carefully and suddenly realized that the date was as above, and that a year ago we were all 'Goldening' together."

In 1928 W.C.B.P. retired from his work at Kemendine, thus depriving Fr. Jackson of a



Fr. Jackson and one of his pupils.

valuable colleague. This, of course, was outwardly only a stimulus to increased activity. It was about this time that the new department for piano tuning and repairs came into being—sole instructor Father J. !

“I have designed a new damper,” he wrote explaining, “which, having no glue, is likely to be more suitable to tropical pianos. Also, my little invention of a damper action gauge for pianos has been executed by a bazaar tinsmith, and has come out very well. We lately inspected a very old model piano with a view to its rehabilitation, and during investigations of the inwards, some six or seven rats jumped out. . . . The government inspector came to inspect the school last week, and announced his intention of staying only a few minutes as a formality. He found things sufficiently interesting to keep him for an hour and a half that day, and to bring him back for two and a half the next !”

Early in 1929 the Simon Commission was in Burma and several of its members visited the mission. Amongst these were Lady Strathcona and Lady Simon.

The sudden death of Mrs. Poulton, the head of the girls' school, involved the withdrawal of Mr. Poulton from the work, and the temporary absence of Sidney Law, who had to accompany Mr. Poulton—who was blind—to England. This left Fr. Jackson single-handed for several months, an impossible position even for a sighted man. "If anything critical should arise now before Sid's return," he wrote towards the end of that time, "I should just sit down and cry!" This, written half laughingly and immediately followed up by plans for a new activity—Burmese type-writing—was yet an indication of his being near breaking point; so it was not to be wondered at that in the beginning of the New Year (1930) he was sent off home by the doctors at a few days' notice, just worn out.

With his usual resilience he quickly recovered tone, and after five months' furlough returned to Burma in time for the patronal festival at Michaelmas, and he was able to speak of feeling more vigorous and capable than he had done for about a year past. He had never missed a Christmas with his lambs since the very beginning of things, and this, his last, was a happier one than ever.

He had composed a Christmas cantata to be performed on Christmas Eve.

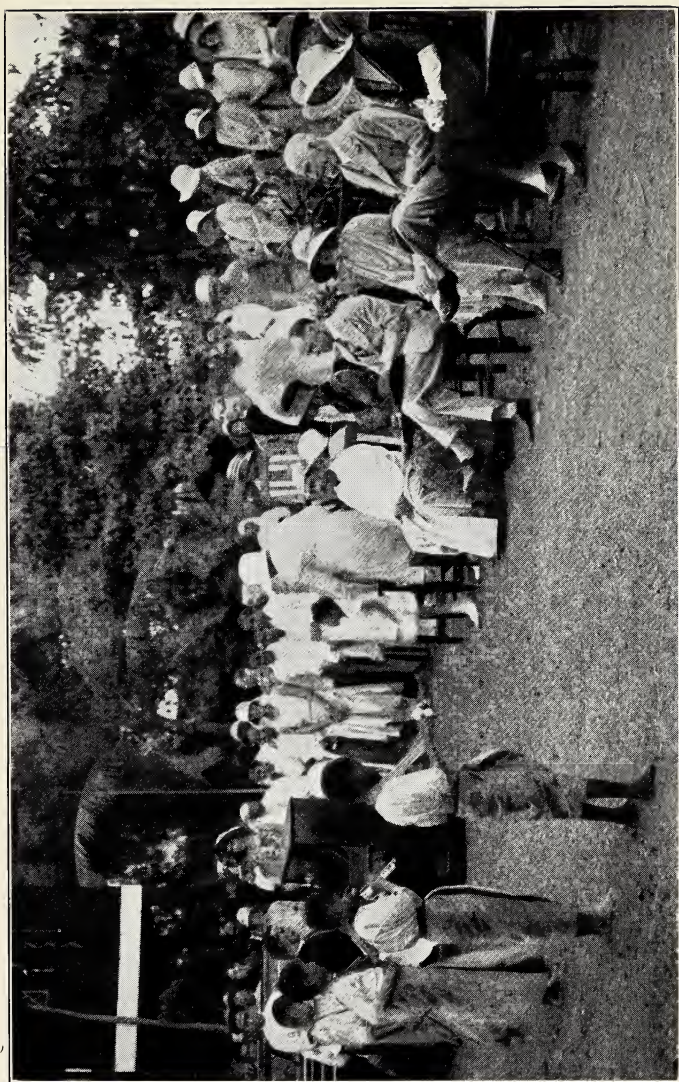
“Titus made a nice sheep,” he wrote, “rushing about the stage on all fours in his ordinary clothes—giving tongue from time to time with a noise more like a lizard than a sheep! Benedict distinguished himself as an angelic visitant to the shepherds, and sang some very quaint home-made melodies. We had a considerably larger attendance of outside people at the midnight Mass this year, and our own numbers are ever on the increase. Saya Yawhan insisted on being got to church this year, the first time for two years. So we secured a stretcher and turned the north transept into a sort of hospital ward. . . .” (Yawhan had been the headmaster of the technical department, but had become crippled with arthritis. It seems almost as though he must have had some prescience of what the coming year would bring, for he only survived his beloved *Apay-gyi* a few weeks.)

“The ceremony of blessing the children on Holy Innocents’ Day grows apace. I had thirty little ones brought to me at the crib this year, and I gather that the church was quite an eye-moistening spectacle. Our recital of

'Original Burmese Carols' was held at the cathedral to a highly appreciative audience, though a small one, as very few Burmans dared venture out owing to the riots. . . . The Columbia representatives engaged me and my carol choir to make gramophone records! . . . It will be rather amusing if they go on to the market! An unpleasant ordeal with twelve youngsters to handle, as any inadvertant sound naturally goes on the record."

The records *are* on the market, and it is interesting to hear from them how he conducts his sightless choir by leading them with his own voice, just a fraction ahead of theirs.

The 1931 exhibition of work was even more successful than the previous ones. The Rangoon press said, "The item which excited the most interest was the musical drill, in which the front row boys used instruments to accompany Fr. Jackson who was at the piano. . . . The boys kept perfect time in their drill." A sideshow planned for the diversion of the visitors was a local telegraph service, by which they could send wires to such of their friends as were at the other end of the compound! The cardboard box work



The Annual Exhibition at Kemendine.

(Fr. Jackson at the piano, H.E. the Governor of Burma on the right.)

on view ranged from hat boxes made for millinery to gramophone record boxes for Calcutta. The Governor, Sir Charles Innes, who presided at the exhibition, said in his speech : "I suppose there are few people in Rangoon who are held in greater respect than Fr. Jackson. Even were he himself not blind, his work here would be worthy of admiration. As it is, it is little short of wonderful, and the high honour of the gold medal of the Kaiser-i-Hind, which was conferred on Fr. Jackson last year, was never more richly deserved."

Early in the year 1931 Fr. Jackson had to be told of his mother's failing health, but it was impossible to convey in writing the heartbreaking truth that she was no longer able to read and enjoy his letters. He no doubt gauged the situation in a measure, and wrote from his heart such encouragement as he might, as the following extracts show :

"The Holy Week services are all going very well. It is wonderful how the veil of the Unseen seems to thin away at this time, and one feels the breath of the great freedom beyond, and all the warmth and vitality of the Sacred Heart pulsating through our nursery of a world."

"I see that old Fr. Tooth has died at the age of ninety-one. I never knew him, but he was a great figure in Church history. . . . I must say a Requiem Mass for him. It must be a fascinating experience to get out into the wider life of the Beyond, and to pick up the threads of relationships and friendships that have been broken here; to say nothing of the immense satisfaction of throwing off the clogged machinery of the body, and feeling strong and able to do all the things that one has wished to do here."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND.

All seemed to be going well till May, when a cable came through to his brother-in-law saying, "Surgeons are sending me home for operation, old trouble recurred ; fair chance of success, am still on my feet and quite cheery." This was followed up by a letter :

"By the time you get this I shall be getting fairly near Europe, that is assuming that I have not had to be dropped over the side ! . . . Time seems to be a fairly important factor, and Maj. T. is of opinion that I have time to get into the hands of the specialist, so that I can be chipped about and be enabled to put in a few—probably only a very few—more thoroughly useful years in Burma. . . . I am quite definitely assuming that I shall either be renovated for service in Burma, or else go out to the Church Expectant. If I thought I were going to be patched up for a vegetable existence at home, I should most certainly stay here and stick it out for the few months that I should last without the operation."

He went straight from the boat train at Victoria by ambulance to the London Hospital, rested a week, had the operation, and left the hospital eighteen days later, July 14th, to stay with his people at Blackheath. But it was the first time he had been home without his mother there; she was seriously ill in a nursing home, and neither was well enough to go and see the other. This was a great grief, and her death a week or two later was almost more than he could bear in his weak state. He went away for a few days to the Purser family at Teynham, a few days of treasured memory to them all, and here became his own bright self again. But Burma called. Almost his first words when he had waked to the fact that he was safely through his operation had been to enquire dates and movement of boats for the return journey. And now that he knew nothing more could be done, he was anxious to be back again to spend his last days with his lambs.

When he left there was apparently no immediate cause for anxiety, but once aboard he became very seriously ill, so that several times the ship's doctor despaired of his reaching the end of the voyage. He arrived safely, however, and was

met at the wharf by his doctor, and in the midst of his lambs at Kemendine once more he revived.

He was taken to the mission house and installed in the room in which his godson, the first Purser baby, had first seen the light some twenty years before. A few days later he cabled, "Received Kaisar-i-Hind medal by private investiture in bed. No need to worry about me; am as comfortable as could be anywhere, and very happy to be in Burma again." Needless to say, he had round him a large band of devoted nurses, particularly Valentine Mark, the one of his staff who had travelled with him to England and most faithfully attended to his every want. His English "son," Sidney Law, too fulfilled all and more than the relationship implied, and Mr. and Mrs. Appleton, who were living in the mission house at the time, did all in their power to ease along the pain-ridden days. Indeed, nothing could exceed the kindness shown on all hands, on his voyages, from doctors and nurses, friends known and unknown. He liked to hear all that was going on, and was able to see his schoolboys from time to time, but it was not to be for long.

On December 5th it was seen that the end was near, and at mid-day he received the *Viaticum* at the hands of Padre Appleton. He whispered, "I shall be helping all I can on the other side." In the evening a party of his schoolboys gathered in the field below and sat singing hymns and psalms : this was Saturday. Very early on the Sunday morning the nurse called Mr. Appleton, who reached the bedside only just in time, so quietly did the dear *Apay-gyi* slip away at the last.

That evening he was taken across to the church, robed in his eucharistic vestments, and there was said the Vespers of the Dead. Following on through Compline, a number of his sons kept watch through the night, and next morning, Monday, December 7th, there was a Requiem Mass at 7.0, followed by the Absolutions, before proceeding to the Kemendine cemetery, where lay so many of those he himself had shepherded and helped over.

* * * *

Thus was the Ambassador set free from his bonds ; but even while he bore them he went about as one untrammelled by them, enjoying the liberty whereby Christ had set him free.

“He was such fun ! . . . I loved to hear him laugh ! . . . Such glorious pluck and joyousness !” His light-heartedness was the note sounded again and again in the many letters that came in. . . . “Living in perpetual darkness, and smitten with a mortal disease, he was almost to the end light-hearted as a schoolboy. He bubbled over with mirth ! He would waltz his blind boys round the school hall at what he humorously called his Night Club till he almost dropped ; he played cards, did comic turns, ran races, invented new games, and entered into every phase of the schoolboys’ life with complete *abandon*. He did not expect or desire a long life, and he burnt out for Christ. There was zest and joy in his living, and in his dying there was no room for tears.”

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J

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